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ABSTRACT

In addition to the variety of programs, activities, scholarships, and brochures included in Memphis State University's (MSU) minority recruiting program, the institution uses two approaches to the use of media not normally used in recruiting African-American students. The first is a newsletter aimed at historically African-American churches and the second is an award-winning video. The newsletter, "Staying in Touch," is written and edited by Memphis State students and faculty. It provides high school students and churches with news about pressing issues in the African-American community and about the achievement of MSU's African-American students. The newsletter also serves as a primary communication for the ministerial liaison program, which was established to bridge the gap between MSU and the historically African-American churches in and around Memphis. "Step into Memphis State University" is a 20-minute video produced by a communication professor and a graduate student at MSU. The video is designed to show the minority population that a black student can have a black experience at MSU. The video is organized around a step-dance competition. The fun-oriented group-inclusive video directly meets the challenge of recruiting students who already know of MSU's high academic standards, its academic programs, and its active athletic program. These two approaches have worked well to increase the number of quality African-American students at MSU. (RS)

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UNIQUE APPROACHES AND PROBLEMS IN RECRUITING MINORITY STUDENTS: THE USE OF THE MEDIA

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Memphis State University has a student enrollment of just under 21,000. African-Americans comprise approximately 20% of that figure while another 3.5% of the students are Asian or Pacific Islander, 1/2% Hispanic and 0.2% are Native-American. The University, one of two comprehensive doctoral granting institutions in the state, was integrated in the late 1950's. The Commercial Appeal, while reporting on efforts made by the diversity task force which I co-chaired, as recently as November 7, 1993 indicated that "relations between black and white students have been better at Memphis State University than at some United States universities." Nevertheless, there are identifiable black and white fraternities and sororities, and as recently as 1992 "the student government association eliminated the office of MSU Homecoming Queen after a series of elections that polarized supporters of candidates on the basis of race that led to accusations of voting irregularities." On the other hand, the University has been singled out in national studies as having one of the highest rates of retention and graduation for black students of any major university. Indeed, MSU's graduation of black students often exceeds the graduation rates both in percentage and in numbers of historically black institutions. The University has been so successful in graduating minority students that the Educational Testing Service is studying the University's programs to see if MSU's success can be duplicated at other institutions.

However, this paper is not about what Memphis State does while students are attending the University, although that is a basic element to any good recruiting program, but rather, it is concerned with some of the techniques involving media used to attract minority students to the University. Obviously, recruitment involves a variety of approaches other than media including a special fall and spring African-American Recruitment Day, special enrichment institutes during the summer, college student mentoring programs in the black community, minority merit scholarships for both resident and non-resident students, minority transfer scholarships for students attending community colleges and a ministerial matching grant program aimed at African-American students with memberships at Memphis/Shelby County historically African-American churches. Memphis State does, of course, have the usual high gloss literature including brochures aimed directly at the African-American community. One that leaps to mind is the Memphis State University "Celebration of Diversity" brochure which emphasizes the nurturing environment of the University for the African-American student. It includes information on the programs which I mentioned above and points out the existence of special organizations for black students including the Black Student Association, Black Scholars Unlimited, Black Studies Club, The Gospel Choir, etc.

I want to spend the time available talking about two approaches to the use of media in recruiting which I believe are not normally used in recruiting African-American students.

The first is a newsletter aimed at the "historically African-American churches." The second is an award winning video, which perhaps some of you were able to witness at last year's meeting of the Southern States Communication Association where it was one of the featured videos on the mass communication division media program.

I will discuss the newsletter aimed at the churches first. The name of the newsletter is Staying In Touch. It is written and edited by Memphis State students and faculty with the purpose of providing "high school students and churches with news about pressing issues in our community and about the achievements of MSU's African-American students." It also serves as a primary communication for the ministerial liaison program. The ministerial liaison program was established to "bridge the gap between MSU and the historically African-American churches in and around Memphis." Although this program might be seen as an important community outreach it is also an important recruiting outreach.

Several individuals have questioned how a state university is able to publish a newsletter which clearly has a religious overtone and content. The answer is quite simple. The University analyzed its audience and many of the students we wished to recruit are closely connected to or influenced by historically black churches. In spite of the fact that the University was integrated over three decades ago, many African-Americans in Memphis and the surrounding counties view the University with suspicion and harbor the belief that it is not their university. This publication clearly attempts

to put the University in a positive light by providing a vehicle to show that African-American students play a significant role at the University and have indeed been successful both entering at the University and while attending the University. More indirectly, it provides for its readers an association with the University and is tangible evidence that the University cares about them and wants them to be involved. By all accounts the newsletter Staying In Touch has had a very positive impact on the black community of Memphis and is an important community outreach and recruiting vehicle.

STEP INTO MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY is a video approximately 20 minutes in length produced by communication Professor Roxanne Gee and graduate student Shannon McIntosh. The concept of this video was not to do another "look at all the great programs we have," but instead the video was designed to show the minority population that, as one of the students in the video said, "a black student can have a black experience at Memphis State University." The video is organized around a dance. A very popular activity with African-American students at MSU is a step-dance competition. The dance is a group activity that involves costumes, highly organized choreographed steps, and sometimes canes or other props. It requires hours of rehearsal and the precision of a drill team. Sections of the video show black life at the University through the testimony of articulate students who give extemporaneous answers to questions designed to accent their success and happiness with the University. The scenes are shot in various setting around the

University to show the full integration of the students into college life as well as to show them in positions of influence and control over this life. I cannot emphasis enough how the video accents the nurturing, caring, fun, and full collegiate experience available to minority students at Memphis State University. Indeed, one student indicates that going to MSU is like having your cake and eating it too. You have the experience of a small black college within a large state university with the advantages of both.

The video takes on head first, competition from historically black institutions. Because Memphis State University has rigorous admission standards it is often competing for the best of the African-American student population. Our research indicates that most students believe we already have fine academic programs and through the success of our basketball team know we have an active athletic program. Their questions focus on what type of life we have for African-American students outside of sports and the academic programs. Thus, this fun oriented group-inclusive video directly meets that challenge. As I indicated previously, the video has won a number of awards, but more importantly it has won the hearts of the African-American students. It is not unusual for African-American high school students to request that the video be shown more than once. It not only provides answers to their questions about African-American life, but its entertainment features are clearly enjoyed.

I do not know if the two unique approaches described in this paper will work to increase the number of African-American students at your college or not, but there is no question in my mind that they have worked quite well to increase the number of quality African-American students at Memphis State University.